No. 37 5 CENTS

Young Rough Riders Weekly

MOST FASCINATING WESTERN STORIES

THE YOUNG ROUGH RIDERS IN KANSAS

or The Trail of the Outlaw

The train robbers rushed at Ted, and for a moment there was a desperate struggle. It looked as though Ted would be thrown from the swiftly moving car before his friends, Kit Summers and Bud Morgan, could come to his assistance.

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The Young Rough Riders Weekly

Most Fascinating Western Stories

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The Young Rough Riders in Kansas;

OR,

THE TRAIL OF THE OUTLAW.

By NED TAYLOR.

CHAPTER I.

A MIX-UP AT THE STATION.

It was just about time for the night train on the W. Q. and T. railroad to leave for the West.

There was a hurrying throng at the station. Porters were shouting and jostling as they wheeled heavy truck loads of freight down the station platform to be piled on the out-going train. The train was an express that ran through Kansas across the rockies, all the way to the coast, and it was carrying a heavy load this time.

Passengers who were going west on the train were bidding their friends good-by, while others were bustling about attending to the luggage or trying to secure seats in the Pullman cars.

Among the crowd at the station were Ted Strong and Kit Summers, the two boys who had formed the organization of the young rough riders to run a ranch and who were now starting west again after a tour about the country which had wound up in Chicago.

They were on their way to Kansas where they intended to look over some of the famous short-horned cattle which is raised there, with a view of restocking their ranch at Black Mountain, Dakota.

They had already attended to the checking of their baggage and secured seats in one of the Pullman cars. The rest of the boys forming the association of the young rough riders were already aboard the train, having taken possession of the greater part of one of the cars, but Ted and Kit preferred to stay outside until the train pulled out of the station.

They had no troubles of their own, and so they

could afford to take their ease and watch the other people hustling about in all directions.

Suddenly Kit started forward with a cry of glad surprise.

"Why, how are you, Miss Tremaine?" he cried. "You are not going out on this train, are you?"

The person he addressed was a slim, graceful girl dressed in a handsome traveling suit. She turned at his cry, showing a handsome face which flushed rosy red when her eyes fell upon Kit.

"Kit Summers!" she said, in tones which showed that the surprise was as pleasant to her as it was to Kit. "And Ted Strong! I didn't expect to see you here. Where are all the other boys? And where are you going?"

"The other boys are inside that parlor car," said Ted, stepping forward and lifting his hat. "All the rough riders are going through to Kansas. But you are not traveling alone, are you?"

"I was to meet a friend of my uncle's, who was to go west with me," said Adelaide Tremaine. "I just received a telegram from him that he could not come, so I will have to travel alone."

"Not alone," said Kit, with a glance of admiration at the girl's face. "I'm traveling on this train, and, if you don't object, I'll see to it that you don't suffer very much from loneliness."

"I'm sure I don't object. My seat is in that car away down at the other end of the train, and yours is in this one here. The conductor is the only man who is likely to make any objections."

"What do I care for him!" said hot-headed Kit. "If you let me I'll run and see him right away and get him to change your seat into our car. But what on earth are you carrying that big grip about for? Why don't you have one of the porters take it? And how far west are you going, anyway?"

"Oh, dear! The way you fire questions at me I don't know which to answer first."

"Answer any you please," said Ted. "I felt like asking you all those same questions myself, but I couldn't fire them out quite so fast as Kit."

"Well—to begin with, I am going as far west as Beaumont, Kansas, where I am going to visit with a girl friend. The reason I am carrying this bag with me is that there is something particularly valuable in it—the deeds to certain property out in Beaumont, and my uncle says that he is sure that my brother, Dick Tremaine, will get away with it if he can get the chance."

"I don't like to say anything against a brother of yours," said Kit, "but from all that I have seen of Mr. Dick Tremaine, I think that your uncle is right in his suspicions."

"I feel that you are right in what you say," sighed the girl. "After that attempt made by my brother to kidnap and force me into marrying that friend of his I feel that I can trust him no longer. That is one reason I am so anxious to keep this bag in my own hands. I know that my brother is very anxious to get it into his possession. The land to which these are the title deeds was left to me, but there was some dispute about the validity of the will, and my brother, who has wasted his own share of the fortune, lays claim to this also. If he could only get these deeds in his possession he could make good his claim. He is still in Chicago and I am afraid."

"You don't think that he would dare to try to run off with you again, do you?"

"No, he would not dare to use force with me. He tried deception the last time and failed. He knows that he cannot deceive me again. But I am afraid that he will make some attempt to take the satchel away from me. He knows that I must take the deeds out West with me."

"You think that he might try to steal the satchel from you?"

Adelaide nodded.

"I'd like to see him try it!" cried Kit Summers, his dark eyes flashing. "Just let me see him try it. The young rough riders are here. They will fight him now as they fought him before. They beat him before and they'll beat him this time."

"All aboard!" yelled the conductor.

"Oh, dear!" said Adelaide. "I'll be left behind."

"Help Miss Tremaine to get settled," said Ted

swinging himself aboard the car. "I have got to go and see how the rest of the fellows are getting along."

Ted knew that, although Kit had only been acquainted with this beautiful girl for a short time, he was violently smitten with her. He had given Kit a chance to be with her for a little while, and Kit was not slow to take advantage of it. He seized the grip with one hand, Adelaide's arm with the other and hurried her off in the direction of her own car.

Kit's one regret in leaving Chicago had been that he was going out of reach of Miss Tremaine and now that he had learned that she was actually going to make the same journey on the same train, he was in the seventh heaven of delight.

The young rough riders had made the acquaintance of Adelaide Tremaine in a peculiar fashion. It had come about in the first place through Bud Morgan. Bud, who was an out and out Western cowboy and who had joined the young rough riders when they first started in the ranching business, had started in to paint the town of Chicago red on his arrival there.

He had succeeded in raising a disturbance in a theater. He had very nearly started a row between Ted and Mr. Markely, a theatrical manager and the uncle and guardian of Adelaide Tremaine, and had finally wound up in a police station.

He discovered, however, a villainous attempt on the part of the girl's spendthrift brother to force the girl into a marriage with a friend of his named Regan in order that the two villains might divide her fortune between them.

Mr. Markely had called in the assistance of the young rough riders to get the girl out of their hands and the boys had all pledged themselves to help him.

One clear, autumn morning they had given Regan the surprise of his life by attacking him, leaving him bound in the bottom of his carriage and restoring the girl to her uncle.

Regan and his friend, Dick Tremaine, had found out the identity of the boys who had treated them to this unpleasant surprise and had vowed vengeance against the young rough riders, but as yet the boys had not been bothered by them, and, needless to say, they were not losing very much sleep over it.

Kit was thinking over all these things as he helped his companion into the car.

"It's great luck to meet you so soon again," said he.

"Is it?" said Adelaide, raising her eyebrows.

"Of course it is. At least for me. Perhaps it isn't for you."

"I don't know—I guess perhaps it is."

The train had started now and the girl was already in her seat in the car. There were no other vacant seats, so Kit could not sit down beside her.

"You'll have to go back and join your friends," said Adelaide.

"I'm going to look up the conductor and get him to change your seat for one in our car. But, perhaps, you don't want to come in and sit with a crowd of boys."

"I'd love to. How are they all? How is Bud and Bob Martin and the rest?"

"All fine!" said Kit. "And they will all be delighted to see you again, you may be sure. But I'm off now to look up the conductor."

Kit darted away and the girl settled back in her seat and opened a magazine that lay in her lap. There were some interesting pictures in it, and she soon became so engrossed that she was oblivious to everything that was going on around her.

It was owing to this fact that she did not notice a large, bearded man who peeped into the car and looked at her for a moment. His eyes were as sharp as gimlets, and they seemed to be searching for something that they expected to find.

At length they rested on the bag which Adelaide had been carrying and which Kit had left on the floor in front of her.

This was evidently what the eyes had been seeking for.

An expression of satisfaction came over the face of the bearded man.

"There it is," he muttered, "the girl fooled me once. She shall not fool me the next time. She hates me, and, by heaven! although she is my own sister, I hate

her. She is going out to Beaumont to settle up the matter of that estate. She must be taking the deeds with her. She has packed them in that bag. They are too precious to be sent along with the rest of her baggage. I heard enough of her talk with that young pup she met, to know that. The young rough riders are on this train, but they shall not interfere with me a second time."

Dick Tremaine, for it was he, gazed steadily at his sister for a moment with a look of the bitterest hatred on his face.

She was still bending over her magazine and could not see him. In spite of that fact, however, she began to feel uncomfortable. She shivered slightly.

"I wonder what makes me feel this way," she said to herself. "I feel as if there was some danger of my losing that bag. I have a feeling as if my brother were around somewhere. It is silly, for he does not know that the papers are in this bag, and, besides, that the young rough riders are here to protect me. It is silly of me. There is the bag lying before my eyes, and yet I feel that there is some danger of losing it."

She bent over and touched the bag with her hand as though there were really some danger of her eyes deceiving her in regards to its whereabouts.

She sat up suddenly and glanced at the door. The bearded face, which had been peering in at her, had disappeared as suddenly as she had looked up. Had she seen that face she would have known that there was really some reason for her fears.

It was the face of the man who had determined to steal her inheritance from her at all hazards—the face of her brother, the man whom she dreaded more than anything or anyone else in the world.

CHAPTER II.

AN ENCOUNTER.

The westbound train pulled out of Chicago just about sundown. By the time it had sped through the outskirts of the city, off along the gleaming tracks and out upon the broad, dark prairies to the southward and westward, it was quite dark, and the lights in all the long train of cars had been lit.

It took Kit Summers some little time to find the conductor. He finally discovered him in the front car of the train and explained what he wanted.

There was a vacant seat in the car occupied by the young rough riders and Adelaide's check was changed for this.

Then Kit started to find Adelaide. He had to pass the whole length of the train to do this, as he had found the conductor in the front car and the girl was in the last of the passenger cars, which was followed directly by a single freight car that was attached directly behind. The car next to the front was a smoking car. It was deserted save for three roughly clad men, who were seated up at one end of it. Just as Kit Summers entered the front door of the car a large, bearded man entered the rear door. Kit was marching through the car in a great hurry, and did not notice this bearded man until he bumped into him halfway down the car.

He looked up into his face, then uttered a cry of astonishment.

"Tremaine!" he exclaimed. "You aboard this train!"

The man who had bumped into him cast a hurried glance around the car.

"Shut up, you young whelp," he said, in low tones, blocking the way so that the boy could not pass him.

"Let me pass," said Kit.

"Where to?"

"It's none of your business, but I don't mind telling you. I am going to see your sister and tell her that you are aboard this train."

"You are not."

"Why not?"

"Because I have decided that you are not."

Kit glanced around. The three men who had arisen by this time were gathering behind him. If their dress was rough their faces were still rougher. Kit could see at a glance that they belonged to the very lowest order of thugs, but what alarmed him still more they seemed to be in some sort of an understanding with the man who was blocking his passage.

"Is this one of them young pups you was a-speakin' of, boss?" queried the foremost of the trio.

"This is one of the young rough riders," sneered Tremaine. "I think we shall try and persuade him to remain here with us for a little while. It's not likely that anyone will disturb us while we are here. The conductor has just passed through, and he won't be back in this car. There is time for a quiet little talk with our young friend here. If he gets too noisy we may be forced to open one of the windows and drop him outside. I think that may hurt him a little, for the ground has been frozen quite hard."

Kit did not wait to hear any more. He launched himself forward at Tremaine like a tiger, and had the satisfaction of landing one good punch on his jaw that made him give vent to a muttered oath.

The men behind grasped him at once, and one of them threw a cloth over his face.

Kit tried to yell, but the soft cloth was passed into his mouth, and when he opened it he was nearly smothered.

He put up a tough fight. If there is any one of the young rough riders who is a plucky and desperate fighter from heel to toe, it is Kit Summers. The four men who had attacked him realized this. Kit fought with his hands and feet, butted with his head like a bull, kicked and struck fiercely in all directions.

Down on the floor he went with the others sprawled all on top of him. Over and over he rolled in the narrow aisle between the seats of the car. Whatever noise the fight might have caused was drowned by the thunder of the train as it rolled along. The four men fought silently and desperately. They knew that they must overpower the boy speedily and without attracting the attention of any one in the adjoining cars.

One of them received a kick in the shins that almost broke his leg. Another got a punch in the nose that made him think that it was flattened even with his face. A third received Kit's head full in the stomach and was sent staggering back. But the contest was too unequal to last long.

Kit was borne backward on the ground. One man held his feet in spite of all his efforts to shake them free. Another caught his wrists and clung to them while a forth dropped with his knees on his chest knocking all the wind out of him.

A moment later Kit was lying on his back, bound hand and foot, a coarse cloth stuffed into his mouth and tied firmly behind, so that it was impossible for him to utter a single sound.

Tremaine got on his feet and glanced anxiously toward both ends of the car. There was no one at either end, and the doors were still firmly closed. The overpowering and binding of Kit Summers had been accomplished without attracting the attention of a soul, although a crowd of his companions were seated quietly in the same train only a short distance away, although a whole, great train load of people were within a few feet of him.

"We have him, boys," said Tremaine. "Haul him up to the end of the car and drop him behind one of the seats where no one will see him if they should happen to come into the car. Are you sure that he is tied hard and fast, Bill?"

"He's tied all right," said the fellow. "Trust Bill Jenks for making the knots good and tight. Curse him! He hit me a fearful smash on the nose."

"Never mind your nose now," said Tremaine. "The work that I hired you fellows for isn't done yet. We still have to get our hands on that bag that I pointed out to you in the girl's hand when she went past us at the station."

"I never thought I was going to stack up against a young hyener like this," said another of the trio, rubbing his injured shin. "There's a lot more of them in the other car. All dressed like this feller, too, in soldier clothes. I guess they're all scrappers, too, like this feller. You said as how they was nothin' but a gang of fool boys, but they is the spryest-lookin' gang o' fools I ever run inter. This here feller fights like a wild cat. I reckon he's one of them there fellers that would ruther fight than eat. Holy smoke! He hit me a rotten dig in the shins."

"Cut that out, Stumps," said Tremaine, harshly. "If you don't get this fellow into a place where he won't be seen there'll be trouble. I hoped that we

wouldn't have any dealings with these rough riders. I had to tackle this fellow because he met me—as ill luck would have it. He would have gone and warned the others that I was on the train. And then there wouldn't have been much chance of getting that bag. That fellow, Ted Strong, is about as fly as they make them, and he would have watched that bag so close we couldn't have got so much as a smell at it if this chap got word to him that I was on the train."

This conversation had been carried on in low tones while the helpless but conscious form of Kit Summers was being dragged over to one corner of the car and shoved down between two of the seats.

It seems remarkable that a man should lie bound and helpless in a modern railway train, with people passing to and fro through it, without any of these people being aware of it; but this is what happened on this particular occasion.

Tremaine had not expected to run up against the young rough riders so soon after his recent defeat by them, but he was a clever scoundrel, and he soon devised a method of getting the only one of the boys on the train who knew of his presence there out of the way.

The plan was simple enough and easy enough, although few people would have thought of it.

It was simply to lay Kit, with his knees pulled up so that they met his chin, in between two of the seats in one of the corners and then to pile baggage and coats upon him until he looked like a heap of baggage.

It was uncomfortable for Kit, but he was bound and gagged so tightly that resistance was impossible.

It was accomplished by piling the coats of all four men upon the boy, and when the conductor entered the car again he never suspected that there was a human being under the stack of clothing.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAIN ROBBER.

Kit could hear the conductor coming close beside him—so close that his leg almost brushed against him. He was in pitchy darkness, unable to move a limb or utter a sound, very much bruised and sore from his recent struggle, but very much alive for all of that. The weight of the coats piled on him, together with a few hand bags, was considerable, and he was nearly smothered under them. He was very warm and very uncomfortable.

He heard the conductor stop and heard the click as he punched the tickets. Then he moved on, and the door banged as he left the car once more.

Kit's heart sank, for he had been hoping that the conductor might see something suspicious that might lead him to make an investigation into the pile of baggage of which he was a part. It looked now as if there was no hope for him. He might remain there till the end of the journey without any further attention being paid to him.

The villains above him began to talk freely again. Kit could hear every word they said.

"Well," said Tremaine, "that is a pretty slick hiding place. That conductor never suspected for a minute. Now we can set about getting the bag."

"We ought to throw that fellow out of the window," said Stumps.

"We couldn't get him through the window," said Tremaine. "Later on when we are passing that high embankment one of us can keep a watch at the door, while the others can drag him out to the car platform and drop him off. It's a cold night, and there will be no one hanging about the platform then. It isn't likely that there will be anyone else coming into this car. There is a full hour's run, without any stops, when we leave the next station, and we can get rid of him in good shape."

"Poor kid," said the third of Tremaine's hirelings, whose name was Slater. "He'll be smashed to pieces when he tumbles down that big embankment from a train going at this rate. There will not be a whole bone left in his body."

"That's what we want," said Tremaine, savagely. "If we want to keep the others ignorant of our game—if we want to keep out of jail, that is what we will have to do, get rid of him, and get rid of him for good just as soon as we possibly can."

"That's right," came the hoarse voice of Jenks. "We don't want no sentiment in this. Now, boss, here's the layout. You hired me to steal a bag from a girl on this here train. You hired me in the first place because you were too well known to the girl to work it yourself. In the second place, because I am a train man and has worked on the road here and knows the lines, and you hired my two pals here to fight this here gang of boys that's on the train."

"That's it. And I hired you because I knew that the girl would be on the watch, and that she would tell the porter of the train to keep his eye on that bag if she moved away from it for a minute. Some one will have to get into the car and get that satchel out of it without anyone in the car knowing how it is done. If you can accomplish that, I'll see to it that you are well paid for it."

"That's a cinch fer me," said Jenks. "That is just as easy as getting money in er registered letter. What car did you say the girl was in?"

"The last of the passenger cars."

"The one next to the freight car, hey? That makes it easier and easier."

"How are you going to work it?"

"I'll work it all right. But I want one man to help me. Are you game to climb out on the top of that freight car with the wind blowing as cold as ice through your hair and the car racing along at fifty miles an hour?"

"I'm game for anything so long as I get my hands on that bag. I am a ruined man without it. It means fortune for me. I don't care what the risk is if we can only get the bag."

"That's the way that I like to hear a man talk. You'll get the bag, all right. I have it all planned out."

Jenks reached his hand in his pocket and drew out a fishing line wrapped around a piece of wood.

"There's the thing that's goin' ter win that bag fer ye," he said.

"How's that going to do it?"

"Never mind, it will do it all right."

"Where are you going now?"

"I'm going to the rear to see how the land lies. I can get about these trains as much as I want, being as I'm a mechanic working on the road. I'll come back to you when I look things over."

"With this fellow lying here I don't feel safe——"

"It won't be long till you can chuck him out."

With this announcement, which sounded ominous in the ears of the helpless boy, Jenks left the car.

* * * * * * *

In the meantime Adelaide had been sitting still, wondering what had become of Kit Summers. She had expected to have a nice time with Kit and the other boys, and she felt a good deal put out that he should have deserted her that way.

She tried to get interested in her magazine, but she was thinking more of the young rough riders than of what she was reading. At length she tossed the magazine aside in disgust.

As she glanced up she saw a couple of men walking forward through the car. She thought that one of them looked a little like her brother, and then she laughed at herself for thinking so.

"I'm getting silly," she thought. "I'm so easily scared now that it's a wonder I'm not afraid of my own shadow. I wish Kit or some of the other boys would come. I don't think that it's a bit nice of them to run away and leave me that way when I am so lonely here all by myself."

She was interrupted in her meditations by a roughly attired man who carried a few tools in his hand.

He stopped by her seat.

"Can I disturb you for a minute, miss?" he said. "There is something the matter with the steam pipes that run through this car. I think that there must be a leak somewhere along here, and I would like to test the pipes."

"Certainly," said Adelaide. "Do you want me to move this bag out of the way?"

"No, don't trouble yourself. I won't be a minute."

Several of the passengers glanced casually at the fellow who was monkeying about the steam pipes, but it was very hard to see what he was doing. He rose to his feet, shoved the window up, and thrust his head out of it, groping upward with his hands

"Ah!" he said, drawing back into the car once more. "The trouble is in the roof of the car. It is in the steam pipe that runs along there. I must go outside for a moment."

He ran outside, leaving the window open. Adelaide glanced at her bag to see that it was all right, and was just preparing to sit down again when the workman, who had disturbed her before, appeared again. He began to screw at one of the lights, and, of a sudden, all the lights in the car went out.

There was a chorus of groans from the passengers, but the darkness only lasted for a very short time, the lights glowing out again an instant later.

"That's where the trouble was," said the workman. "It's all right now. Do you want this window down again, miss?"

"Please!" said Adelaide.

The window was pushed down, and the workman, gathering up his tools, stepped away.

She reached out her feet to rest them on her precious bag where they had been resting before she stood up.

She found no bag there. She started forward.

The man must have shifted the bag when he was working at the pipes.

She peeped under the seat ahead, looked in the aisle and looked under her own seat, but she could see no sign of it.

The bag was gone!

The girl started to her feet with a wild cry of alarm.

But at that moment her cry was drowned in other sounds.

The door of the car was flung open violently and a boy dashed in, ran the length of the car, and out the other door. It was Ted Strong, and several other boys dashed after him.

An instant later a sound of shouting and scuffling and the heavy bang of a revolver sounded high above the rumbling of the train!

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT CARL SCHWARTZ DISCOVERED.

The young rough riders had been seated in their car for some little time when Bud Morgan shifted uneasily in his seat, pushed back his long, yellow hair, and said that he wondered what had become of Kit.

"Jumpin' sandhills!" he said, "whatever has become of thet there young maverick?"

"Don't worry yourself about him," said lazy, big Ben Tremont. "Here we have a chance to sit quiet and rest ourselves. Let's sit here and rest, and don't disturb our repose."

"It is very bad to have your repose disturbed," said the lean, lanky boy who always imagined that he was suffering from some disease and who was known to the other boys as Beanpole. "I know the effects of worry and disturbances of the repose. I know what they mean and what they do to the constitution. It was worry which gave me the attack of nerves from which I am now suffering. It was disturbances of the repose that gave me the attack of spinal meningitis from which I still suffer and which I believe has become incurable."

"Oh, repose!" said little rosy-cheeked Bob Martin. "Oh, sleep! As Shakespeare remarks, 'Sleep that knitteth up the raveled sleave of care and makes us so dopey we don't know where we are at.'"

"Kit is probably sitting in that rear car talking to that pretty girl, Adelaide Tremaine, and forgetting all about us," said Cole Carew.

"He isn't, either," said Ted. "He passed through this car to the front of the train to look for the conductor to get a seat changed for Miss Tremaine. He went to the front of the train to look for the conductor, and he would have had to pass through here to get back to the rear. He hasn't done it."

"It takes ther capting ter do ther reasonin'," said Bud, glancing admiringly at his young leader. "Jumpin' sandhills! Ted, ye hev a great head on ye."

At that moment, Carl Schwartz, the German member of the young rough riders, sauntered into the car and tumbled heavily into a seat.

"Well, little brighteyes," said Bud Morgan, "where have ye been?"

"Tell me, pretty Dutchman, where, oh, where, have you been roaming?" said Bob Martin.

"I vos takin' a valk mit mineselluf," said Carl. "I

vos down to near der last oof der cars. A fight vos being made. I saw him through der glass oof der door."

"Saw who?" growled Ben Tremont.

"Der fight," said Carl, placidly. "I don'd vant no fight. I come avay."

"Who was fighting?"

"Some men." Carl closed his eyes placidly and settled himself to sleep.

"Jumpin' sandhills!" said Bud. "A fight an' me not there! What kin I be thinkin' of?"

"I should think you had enough fighting back in Chicago," growled Ben Tremont.

"Who were the men who were fighting?" asked Ted.

"Der is some off der men," said Carl, pointing to a group of men who were passing through the car.

Ted watched the men pass out of the front door and half rose from his seat.

"I'm a little worried about Kit," he said. "He has been back there for a long time. You know how hot-headed Kit is. He may have been in that fight back there."

"Sure!" said Bud, leaping to his feet. "Let's go an' see. If any of them there ornery coyotes have tried to work any gol-durned double cross on Kit, I'll walk my broncho down ther gol-durn throats."

"I don'd see Kit there."

"You wouldn't see anything unless it was rammed down yer throat," said Bud Morgan.

"Yaw," said Carl, indignantly. "Dot's der vay you talk mit yourselluf."

"Let's go front there and see what it all means," said Cole Carew.

"Come on," said Bob Martin, leaping out into the aisle. "As Shakespeare says, 'Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more, and kick the slats out of our foemen's ribs and smash their mandibles and dig their jibs.'"

"Oh, rats!" growled Ben Tremont. "Just as I was settling down to a quiet sleep."

"I'm a britty goot fighder," said Carl. "But I don'd like to fight mit a train ven it runs so fast."

"Come on, boys." Ted led the way out of the car and the rest of the young rough riders trooped after him.

Two cars forward they came to the smoker, in which Carl announced he had seen a fight in progress. They entered it—it was deserted, save for a rough-looking man who sat in the corner guarding an immense pile of coats and luggage.

The man was sleepy-looking as there was nothing in the car to show that anything out of the way had taken place there.

"Are you sure that this was the car?" asked Ted.

"I vos sure dot this vos der car," said Carl.

"Let's ask this yere maverick in ther corner here," said Bud.

The man who was sitting there was Slater. He stirred uneasily in his seat as he saw the group of boys approaching him, and assumed an expression of sulky stupidity. The hand which held the stump of the cigar, which he was smoking, trembled a little, and Ted thought the man seemed to be a little excited.

"Has there been any disturbance in this car?" he asked.

"None that I knows on."

"How long have you been here?"

"Since half an hour afore ther train started."

"One of my friends saw a scrap here a few minutes ago."

"I can't help what he saw."

"Look here, my friend," broke in Bud Morgan, "ye needn't get so gol-durn fly. We air lookin' fer a friend of ours in this car, an' we heerd as how there were a fight here."

"There wasn't any fight here," said the man, in a milder tone. He seemed to be a little frightened at the fierce look that the cowboy gave him. "A few friends of mine were fooling around here a little while ago and they had a little scuffle. That was all. They have gone out now. Perhaps that is what you saw."

"Berhabs dot vas it," muttered Carl.

"Maybe it was," said Ted, "but perhaps you saw my friend pass through here. I want to find where he has gone. He was a dark, good-looking fellow, about my height."

"Maybe I did see him," said Slater. "It seems to me . that I think of it, that a fellow like that did go through the car a little while ago."

"That's funny," said Cole Carew. "I suppose he slipped through our car without our noticing it."

"I suppose so," said Ted, as after a last glance around the nearly empty car, he wheeled slowly around and started toward the door again. He was still suspicious and dissatisfied with the answers that Slater had given him, but there seemed to be nothing for it but to leave the car and search the rest of the train for his missing comrade.

As he walked along the car aisle his head was bent forward in thought. His eyes were scanning the floor of the car, although he had no particular intention of doing so.

Suddenly his eyes fell on something that made him stop short and cry out in astonishment. He bent forward, picked something from the floor, and held it up so that the other boys could see it.

It was a gold cuff link. On it was engraved the monogram of two "R" interlaced. Kit had purchased those links in Chicago. Ted had been with him when he bought them. The two "R" had stood for "Rough Riders." Kit was so proud of being a member of the organization that had already become famous all over the West that he had had the letters engraved on the links.

"Look here, boys," said Ted, as the others gathered around him. "Kit has been in this car. That link is his property. He wore it to-day. I remember noticing it and admiring it this afternoon. It would not have fallen out of his cuff naturally. He must have been engaged in a struggle, and the struggle must have been in the car we are in. It would never have been dropped here if Kit had simply been passing through."

"Then that maverick down there is a most unholy liar," said Bud, wheeling about and looking at Slater, speaking in a voice which was quite loud enough for that individual to hear. Slater appeared to take no notice of it, however.

This, in itself, struck Ted as being a suspicious circumstance.

In three strides he was standing in front of Slater.

"Look here, my friend," he said. "I think that you know more about what has happened in this car than you pretend to know."

Slater's face, as it was turned toward the young rough rider, turned a sickly white.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"Just what I say. I mean that you know that my friend has been in this car—that you know that he has been in some sort of a squabble here."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Make you tell me all that you know."

"This is an outrage. You fellows can't bully me that way. Anyway, I have been telling you all I know."

"Boys," said Ted, "we are going to make a search of this car from one end to the other."

"Don't do that," cried Slater, who was frightened out of his wits by this time. "I'll tell you anything I can."

"Pards," said Bud. "I perpose thet we shoot up this here feller an' make him do ther tenderfoot dance jest ter teach him good manners."

"Where is my friend?" asked Ted, sternly.

"I don't know. I tell you I don't know. I think that he is in the car behind this. I think I saw him go through. I think you will find him there. In fact, he told me that he was going there and that I was to tell you that if he came through."

The ruffian was lying desperately in his fear, but he could not deceive the young rough rider.

"Ben," said Ted, "I wish that you would be good enough to elevate our friend out of that seat that he is clinging to so desperately and stand him up in the middle of the floor so that we can take a good, long look at him. He is a sort of natural curiosity. I just want to see what he looks like when he is standing off by himself and separated from that pile of stuff that he is covering with his legs."

"Let's pull him apart and see what it is that makes him go," suggested Bud Morgan, cheerfully.

"Let's stand around and admire him," said Bob Martin. "As Shakespeare remarks, 'What a piece of wor

is man. What queer-looking legs he has; what enormous feet.' "

"Oof he gets fresh mit me," muttered Carl, "he vill bunch der face oof him mit mine fist, alretty yet, yaw."

"There is something suspicious about the action of that fellow," said Cole Carew. "I think he has been lying to us. I don't like the look of his eye. He knows more than he wants us to know, I am dead sure of that."

"That is just what I think," said Ted. "Go ahead, Ben, and haul him out of there."

Ben, in spite of his drowsy appearance, was simply waiting the word of command. His half-closed eyes had been fixed all the while on the face of Ted Strong. Now, he reached forth his hand and caught Slater by the collar of his coat.

"Let me go!" yelled Slater, clinging desperately to the side of the seat with both hands. "Let me go! Let me out of here. When my friends come back you fellows shall suffer for it. Where's the conductor? Let me go! Oh! Oh!"

Although Slater did not know it, he was in the hands of one of the ten strongest men in America. Those who knew Ben Tremont at college say that there is no standing his enormous strength when he does choose to exert himself, although that is but seldom.

Ben's eyes brightened a little as he seized hold of Slater, and his lips hardened into a firmer line.

Crash!

Slater had been hauled bodily out of his seat and was tumbled in a sprawling heap in the middle of the aisle.

A wild yell came from his lips, and in his struggle to remain where he was one of his feet struck the pile of coats and disarranged them.

Ted sprang forward and threw the rest of the coats aside.

There was Kit Summers! He was bound and crushed so that it seemed as if he could not be alive.

His eyes were closed, and his face was like the face of a man who has been choked to death—blue and ghastly.

CHAPTER X

THE FIGHT ON THE ROOF OF THE CAR.

It was not long before Kit was unbound and ungagged and laid out tenderly on one of the seats.

The young rough riders crowded about him, their hearts filled with sorrow, but, although Kit had already lost consciousness, no sooner had Ted thrown a glass of ice water in his face than he sat up and gasped.

"Who did this?" asked Ted, fiercely. "Who tied you up this way?"

"Tremaine——" said Kit. "On this train. No time to lose. Don't worry about me. I'm all right. Tremaine and three men are trying to steal the bag. They are on the roof of the last car. There is not a minute to lose."

"On the roof of the last car?"

"Sure!" gasped Kit, staggering to his feet. "Never mind me. There is no time to lose. They have a railroad man with them, and they are trying to steal the bag out of the window with a fish line. I heard the fellow explaining it as I was lying there before I went to sleep. They're at it now, and if you don't hurry it will be too late."

Ted was the only one in the party who caught onto the meaning of Kit's words right away. He remembered now the group of rough-looking men he had seen passing to the rear through the car. He understood it all now. Like a flash he wheeled around and started on a run for the door.

"Follow me, boys!" he cried, dashing out.

"Never mind me," said Kit. "I'm all right now, and I'm going with you to get a soak at those fellows who laid me out that way."

The passengers in the next two cars were surprised to see a crowd of excited boys dashing through the train as though their lives depended on their getting to the rear of it within a given space of time. The conductor met them in the car ahead of that and tried to stop them to ask them what they meant by such conduct. Ted, who had a good start on the other boys, had no time to stop and talk to him.

Before the astonished conductor had any idea of

what had happened, he was shoved to one side and the crowd of khaki-clad boys had raced past them and out of the car.

Ted reached the rear platform of the last passenger car. The freight car that had been coupled on behind was jolting and rattling along, making a great racket and rumble. Above the noise, however, Ted could hear the sound of footsteps on the roof and the hoarse voices of men half drowned by the whistling wind.

The freight car did not run as smoothly as the passenger coaches. It rattled and bumped on the rails, for the train was running at the rate of sixty miles an hour.

The cold wind cut into the face of the young rough rider like a knife. It was almost impossible to face it

With set teeth, Ted leaped for the freight car and caught with his hands the iron ladder that ran up the side. In another instant he had climbed it and leaped upon the roof.

His followers were still racing through the car behind, and had not come out upon the platform as yet.

On the roof of the freight car were three men. They were bending over something on the roof, untying a long line which was attached to it. It was the bag containing the title deeds.

Jenks, under pretext of being a workman, had tied the end of the fishing line, which had been previously dropped from the roof of the Pullman in front, so that the wind carried it past the window at which Adelaide Tremaine was sitting.

Then, during the moment in which the lights in the car went out, it had been hauled out of the window and up to the roof, where Tremaine was crouching with his underlings. They had then returned to the roof of the freight car. It was a clever scheme of villainy. Ted Strong had arrived just at its completion.

Tremaine saw him as he clambered upon the roof. He recognized the sombrero and khaki coat at once.

"There's one of those rough riders!" he yelled, leaping to his feet. "At him, boys."

Ted carried a revolver in his hip pocket. He drew it as he clambered to the roof of the car. He had not an instant to lose. Before he could level it, Tremaine had rushed in and grappled with him. Ted fired, but the black-bearded man had grasped the wrist of the hand that held the revolver and the barrel was turned aside.

Grappling with Ted and looking down over the side of the car, Tremaine could see that others of the young rough riders were coming up the ladder to go to the assistance of their leader.

"Grab him, boys," he yelled. "Throw him off the car before the others get here."

The train was now flying along across the high embankment from which Tremaine had proposed to throw Kit Summers.

The three men rushed at Ted, and for a moment there was a desperate struggle.

It was one against three, and Tremaine had grappled with Ted so that he could not use his revolver.

For a moment there was a terrible struggle.

It looked as though Ted would be thrown from the swiftly moving car before his friends, Kit Summers and Bud Morgan, could come to his assistance.

Ted was fighting desperately, one against three.

Further and further back he was pushed.

"Now, boys," panted Tremaine, "a good push and over he goes."

"Not yet," muttered Ted, as with a great effort he shook his hand free and brought the butt of his revolver down on the head of one of his assailants. The man groaned and staggered back. Kit and Ben were on the roof of the car now, but Ted was on the very verge of being pushed off.

He fell to his knees, clinging to the roof with all his might while Tremaine and the other man used every effort to push him off.

Ben reached forward and grasped Tremaine by the collar. Ted was holding to the very edge of the car roof now, but he was holding on tight.

As Kit struggled with one of the men he drew himself up on the roof in spite of the efforts of the other fellow to put him off.

An instant later he was standing on the roof of the car, grappling with one of his foes.

The conductor had heard the shot and the sounds

of a scuffle on the roof of the freight car, and had pulled the bell as a signal to the engineer to come to a standstill.

The train had passed across the high embankment and was slowing up in the middle of a level stretch of prairie.

Ted, as he struggled with his man, saw Tremaine, by a dexterous twist, break away from Ben Tremont and snatch up the bag that still lay on the roof of the car. He understood immediately what the scoundrel intended to do.

"Stop him, Bud and Kit," he yelled. "Don't let him jump off. Don't let him get away with that bag."

Bud and Kit leaped to grapple with Tremaine, but they were too late. Tremaine brushed Kit aside, dodged the outstretched arms of the cowboy and leaped from the roof of the car.

"Follow me, boys," he yelled, as he leaped. "Follow me."

The man who was grappling with Ted made an effort to get away from him and leap also, but he did not reckon on the strength and skill of the young rough rider.

Ted held fast to his collar and at the same time tripped him up so that he fell crashing in a heap.

The third man had better luck.

Cole Carew, who had climbed to the roof of the car behind Kit and Ben, was struggling with him, doing his best to hold him fast.

When Tremaine called out the fellow made a great effort and shook off the freckle-faced lad. He clambered to his feet, and just as the train came to a standstill, leaped out into the darkness.

By this time the struggle on the roof of the car had attracted the attention of everyone on the train.

Curious people were running along the sides of the track calling out to know what was the matter.

They saw two men leap from the roof of the freight car, stagger for a moment and then dash wildly away into the darkness.

They saw Ted sitting on the chest of another man tying his hands and then saw the young rough rider stand up and leap to the ground also.

The conductor ran out and stopped him.

"Here, you," he cried. "You can't get away as easy as that. You raise a disturbance on this train and then try to run away. It won't work."

He caught the young rough rider by the arm and tried to stop him. His own arm was caught in a grasp of iron, and he was pushed away as easily as though he had been a six-months-old child.

Ted spoke a very few words to the conductor, but that functionary remembered them for a long time.

"A man has just stolen valuable property from your train. If you had been wide awake you would have stopped him. He has just made his escape, and you are spoiling the only chance we have of catching him."

The conductor received a shove that nearly knocked him over and saw Ted, followed by Kit Summers, dart away in the direction that the fugitives had taken.

"Who in the world is that fellow?" he said, staggering back. "There's no stopping him at all."

"That is Ted Strong, the young rough rider," said a Western cattle man, who was traveling on the train. "Those other fellows, dressed in brown, are the members of his organization. You can bet that they have some good reason for running down that fellow. They are famous all over the West for the work they have done in the way of ranching and running down outlaws and cattle thieves."

"I've heard of them," said the conductor, in surprise. "I didn't expect to find them on this train. They are certainly a swift crowd."

"Here they come back," said another of the passengers. "They don't seem to have caught the fellows they were after."

"Perhaps they were afraid to chase them in the dark," suggested another.

"Don't fool yourself that way," said the cattle man. "Those fellows never quit a job through fear. The men they were after must have had horses waiting them and got away that way."

Ted Strong stepped up to the conductor at this moment. He did not seem to be even out of breath as the result of his exertions.

"An attempt has been made to rob a girl on this

train of valuable papers," he said. "You will find one thief on the roof of that car and the other tied up in the baggage car, and you can turn them over to the authorities at the next station. The others have made their escape on horses which they had waiting for them at this point."

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRAIL OF THE OUTLAW.

"Well," said Bud Morgan, rolling a cigarette which he lit with a match struck on the pommel of his saddle, "I guess as how we have follered them there fellers purty straight so fur. Ther trail cain't lead very much further without our comin' on 'em."

Ted Strong, Kit Summers and Bud were walking their horses along one of the great stretches of open range land in western Kansas. They had followed the trail of Tremaine and his two hirelings all the way across Iowa, partly through information they gained from conductors and station agents, partly through their ability to trail the outlaw across a stretch of open country. Tremaine had fled westward and westward until this point, and now the young rough rider and his two friends felt confident of coming upon him soon.

The rest of the young rough riders had gone westward on the train to the ranch that they had all expected to visit, but Ted had promised to recover the stolen papers from Tremaine and restore them to his sister, and Kit, owing to his great liking for the girl, had insisted on coming also.

Bud had been brought along because of his great skill as a trailer and scout.

The other members of the band had been very anxious to come, but Ted had put his foot down firmly, saying that three men was sufficient and that any larger number would be a hindrance rather than a help.

"I haven't been always sure that we were on the right trail," said Kit. "It would be very easy to lose the trail of a man when he had traveled so great a distance, both by rail and on horseback."

"I don't think that we need worry about that," said Ted. "Tremaine has not shown very much skill at covering up his tracks. The fact that he wears a beard and that one of his friends is shy a tooth where I hit him made it easy to find how he had traveled as long as he went by rail. We traced his horseback trail beyond a doubt to the point where he took a train after his escape from our hands. We learned from the ticket agent what train he had taken. We found out where he left the train back at Smoky Hill, in Kansas, here, and we found a livery man here who remembers having sold horses to men who answered the description of the three we are after in every detail. We have followed the trail of these three horses for a day now, and we know that we are gaining on them."

"There is only one thing what puzzles me," said Bud. "I cain't make out whatever in ther world he is a-headin' off in this here direction for. Ther is wide rollin' country hereabouts, an', though ther ain't no settlers to speak of here as yet ter tell us ef they hev seen him, it's such a wide open country hereabouts thet ther ain't much gol-durned show of him findin' any place ter hide in. Jumpin' sandhills! I cain't understand what ther move is in headin' off in this here way."

"Have you ever traveled through this part of the country?" asked Ted.

"No, but I've hearn all erbout it."

"There may be something that you haven't heard," said Ted. "Back at Smoky Hill I was talking to a fellow that knows something about this part of the country. He says that to the west of this there is a stretch of land that is of little use either for farming or cattle ranching. It has been spoiled as grazing land by the sheep men who grazed sheep on it. You know that sheep eat so close to the ground that they destroy the roots and sometimes leave the land barren for years."

"I know thet," said Bud. "I've seen many a good piece of range country spoiled by ther gol-durn sheep."

"Well, that is what has happened to the country back here. The sheep men have been chased away or killed by the cowboys, but the land is good for nothing. It is hillier than the rest of Kansas, and has a lot of sagebrush and tumbleweed growing on it. It

is wild and deserted, and has become a haunt for tough characters of all kinds, who are afraid to go back to places where there are any decent people. That's why Tremaine has come here. He probably has hidden here before, and he must have friends among the outlaws here. He knows that we are after him. He knows me, and he knows the young rough riders well enough to know that we would never let him escape as easily as he did. He has fled here, thinking that it is a place where we won't dare follow him."

"He'll soon find out his mistake," said Kit, between set teeth. "We'll run that fellow down if it takes a year."

"We'll camp out when we reach that next clump of trees," said Ted. "There must be a stream there. We can't follow the trail after dark, and I don't think we need worry about not finding him within the next few days. From the tracks left by his horses I should judge that they were pretty well worn out and not able to go much further."

A few minutes later the three boys arrived at a clump of trees and found, as they expected, that it marked the position of a small stream.

The animals were unsaddled, blanketed and staked out to graze, and Bud Morgan busied himself in gathering wood and starting a blaze. Ted and Kit unslung the weapons that hung at their saddles and started off for a hunt through the sagebrush and undergrowth, with which the country was grown.

"We have bacon and flour in our saddlebags," remarked Kit, "but I think we can manage to scare up a little fresh meat somewhere about here. Ther ought to be partridges around this hillside."

There were. No sooner had Kit spoken than the whirring of wings and the rapid flight of a covey of birds brought the boys to a standstill.

Kit carried a shotgun instead of a rifle, for just such emergencies. He fired both barrels and brought down three of the birds.

Ted, who carried a rifle, did not raise it. It would have been of little use for such small game as partridges, but Ted thought that he might find something bigger in the woods into which they were now advancing.

Kit picked up the three birds he had shot.

"Pretty good without a dog," he said. "It shows that there can't be many people roaming about in this part of the country when the game is so tame that we can walk right up to it before it takes to flight. Let's go on a little further and see if we can start any more birds. You should have brought a shotgun, Ted. I don't think it likely that you will have any fun here with a rifle."

"We'll see," said Ted. "Move along as lightly as possible, and don't make any noise that you can help. These scattering woods here are full of game."

In silence they walked slowly forward, stepping lightly and being careful to avoid walking on any twigs whose breaking might frighten the game.

Another group of birds started from the underbrush a little distance ahead. Kit raised his shotgun to fire at them, but Ted reached out his hand and grasped him by the arm.

"What did you do that for?" whispered Kit. "You spoiled my shot."

"Wait a minute, and don't move," answered Ted, in the same low tone. "Look ahead there."

He pointed off to the right.

Kit followed the direction of his finger and gasped with delight. He could just make out the dun-colored body of a deer moving among the trees.

It was going to cross their path, but as it was moving at a run, bounding up and down, it made a very hard mark to hit.

With wonderful speed, Ted threw his rifle to his shoulder and seemed to fire without taking aim. At the crack of the rifle the deer leaped high into the air, half turned and tumbled crashing to the ground.

"That was a dandy shot," said Kit. "Not many hunters would have had the ghost of a chance at that animal."

Ted said nothing but slipped a cartridge into his rifle. The boys were starting forward toward the animal when, to their surprise, two roughly clad men

broke from the trees ahead of them and started to cut up the body of the fallen deer.

Kit dashed forward at a run.

"Let that deer alone," he called. "That's our deer. We shot it. What are you fellows doing with it?"

The two men who were bending over the body of the stricken deer, hunting knife in hand, straightened up from their task and stared at the boys who were approaching them.

One of them was tall and slim, the other was short and stout.

Both were dressed in the roughest sort of frontier garb, and both of them carried six-shooters in their belts, while the taller one had just laid his rifle on the ground.

"What do you fellows want?" asked the taller man, looking insolently at the boys.

"We want that deer," said Kit.

"Then I reckon thet you will keep on wanting it," said the fellow, with a coarse laugh. "This here deer belongs ter me and my pard. You fellows haven't got any right to it."

"We may leave ye the horns when we git through skinnin' it, thet is if ye promise ter be good little boys."

"Take your hands off that deer!"

Ted spoke in a ringing voice for the first time.

There was something in his tones that made the men straighten up suddenly and stare at him.

"That animal belongs to us," said Ted "We shot it and if you think that we are going to [illegible] here [illegible]tly and let you take it, you are mistaken."

"What's that?" gasped the tall man.

"You heard what I said. Just remember that I am ready to back it up with my gun."

For a moment it looked as if the two men were going to try bullying tactics.

They hesitated. But they saw a look on the face of the young rough rider that told them that in spite of his youth he was not one to be easily cowed or bullied.

"Look here, boss," said the tall man, after a moment's silence. "Me and my pard have been hunting that deer. We tracked it for near a mile, and we were just coming to it when you fellows butted in and shot it."

"I shot it. It belongs to me. If you want you can have supper with us and eat all you want of its meat. But we won't let you take it away from us on any bluff that way. You know very well that the deer was too far away from you and going too fast to have a chance of hitting it. I know it, too, and so the bluff doesn't go with me."

The men knew that this was so. They had thought that it would be an easy thing to bluff these two boys, but now they found that their bluff would not work. The short, stout man, however, seemed disposed to carry it a little further.

He evidently had more sand than his lanky companion.

"You fellows can't talk to me that way," he said, in a hoarse voice. "Dan Hillars never stood for no talk like that. If you fellows hadn't been so fresh we might have let you have a little of the meat of it. But now, since you've got so fresh about it, you won't have anything."

"Drop that gun!"

The command came from the lips of the young rough rider like a shot out of a rifle.

The short, stout man had drawn a revolver from his belt and was slowly raising it.

He looked at the young rough rider.

It seemed as if something had happened by magic.

A moment before Ted had been standing with his rifle lying on the ground behind him, his hands hanging idly by his side. Now, a revolver was in his right hand, and it was leveled directly at the heart of the fellow that had been starting in to skin the deer.

The deadly point of the weapon never wavered, and the face behind it was as hard as a rock.

"What do yer mean?" stammered the fellow. "I wasn't a-goin' ter hurt yer."

"I mean what I say. Drop that gun."

"Why should I drop it?"

Crack! The tall man had reached furtively for his own weapon, thinking that Ted was not looking at him. The revolver of the young rough rider had spoken and a second later it was covering the breast of the short man again. So quickly had it all been done that the short man had not time to shift his own position before the revolver was pointed at him again.

The tall man leaped wildly into the air and clutched at his head. He drew his battered hat from his head and looked at it. He ran his hand across the top of his head.

A neat little hole was bored in the hat as cleanly as if it had been stamped out with a die. A furrow was cut through the man's shaggy hair within a quarter of an inch of the scalp.

"Holy smoke!" cried the man. "Ye near blew the top of my head off."

"I'll come a little nearer than that if you don't keep your hand away from your gun and I'll perform the same kind act for your friend there if he doesn't keep his hand away from his firearms, put up his knife and let that deer alone. Back up, my friend, and make up your mind to let that deer alone. It is ours, and we mean to have it."

Dan Hillars turned a sickly white and raised both hands above his head. In the meantime, Kit had covered the taller of the two with his revolver. The tall fellow was still holding his hat in his hand, looking at the hole in the crown of it with a frightened expression on his face.

"Let up there, kid," said Hillars, in frightened tones. "Don't shoot, fer Heaven's sake! I was only foolin'. I only did it fer a joke. I didn't mean ter keep ther deer. It were only a little joke on you boys. For Heaven's sake don't keep a-p'intin' thet gun at me thet way. It might go off."

"Yes, indeed, it might," said Ted, coolly. "That's why I'm pointing it at you."

"It were only a joke."

"So is this a joke."

The revolver banged again. A shrill yell came from the lips of Dan Hillars.

A neat little hole appeared in his hat similar to the one that had been shot through the hat of his companion.

"I am very fond of jokes," said Ted, with a grim smile. "How do you like my style of joking?"

"Let up, pard, fer Heaven's sake!"

"You are sure that you intend to make no further claim upon that deer?"

"Sure!"

"And you admit that it belong to us?"

"In course I do. I was only jokin' when I said anything different. Can't you take a joke, pard? I didn't mean no harm, nohow."

"All right. I'm glad to hear it. The best thing that you and your friend can do is to wheel around and march away from here as fast as your legs will carry you. And I advise you not to try any more of those practical jokes. They may prove dangerous."

"Lower yer gun, pard, an' we'll go."

"About face!"

The two men wheeled about.

"March!"

Off they tramped till they had disappeared in the woods.

"Now," said Ted, "we'll go back and have supper. But we will have to keep our eyes open for those fellows. They will try and get square on us, you may be sure."

CHAPTER VII.

DAN HILLARS AND HIS FRIEND.

With the knowledge that two revolvers were pointing steadily at their backs and liable to go off at any minute, the two men who had tried to bluff the young rough rider out of the deer that rightfully belonged to him, tramped away through the undergrowth at a very brisk pace indeed.

It was not till they had marched nearly a quarter of a mile that either of them dared to turn his head. Then Hillars looked around cautiously.

"It's all right, Sam," he said. "We're outer sight o' them young varmints now. We might as well pull up for a minute.'

"Holy smoke!" said the fellow addressed as Sam. "Them there fellers are holy terrors. They come durn near shootin' me through the head."

Hillars looked at him angrily.

"Darn it all!" he said. "If ye had any spunk in ye, we might have got ther best of them."

"What could I do? I tried ter make a move when he had you covered. But that fellow is greased lightning with a gun. Before I knew what had happened a bullet whistled across ther top of my scalp, an' I thought for a moment that I was shot fer fair. Then his pard, with the black hair, had me covered, an' I saw thet ther wasn't any use. Both them fellers is greased lightnin' with a gun."

"The feller thet fired ther shots is ther slickest. It's easy ter see thet he is ther commander of ther two, an' takes ther lead in everything they does. I tell ye, Sam Rooks, I'll get square with thet feller before long."

"I wonder who he is?" said Sam Rooks. "He's a stranger around these here diggins, that's sartin. There ain't anyone in this here part of ther world what can handle a gun so slick as he can. An' he's only a young feller at that."

"I know who he is. Ye remember how Tremaine come up to our shack this mornin' an' said as how some people had been chasin' him but that he give them ther slip."

"Sure I do."

"And do ye remember as how he said that ther was a gang of young fellers called ther young rough riders a-chasin' him?"

"I remember that all right."

"He said thet ther young rough riders wore soldier clothes like what these here fellers wear an' thet they was commanded by a young feller named Ted Strong, who was a good shot an' pretty slick at all sorts of outdoor work. He said this feller had done him a bad turn once before, an' that he was likely to get after him again. Well, thet there feller we was foolin' with back there was Ted Strong, ther capting of ther young rough riders. An' ther feller as was with him was one of his band."

"Holy smoke! I've heerd of Ted Strong afore now. He's rounded up a lot o' bad men in ther past year or so. If I had known that that was him ye kin bet that I wouldn't have done any foolin' with him. I've heerd that he was a holy terror."

"He may be a terror, all right," growled Hillars, "but ye can bet yer last dollar thet I'll get square with him before I finish. Tremaine wants to put him out of business, and he'll be durn glad to find out where he is."

"We oughter git back ter headquarters then an' tell Tremaine that this Ted Strong has showed up here."

"Not yet. The first thing that we have ter do is ter find out where these here gol-durn rough riders has their camp an' how many there is of them. Then we can report ter Tremaine an' get ther gang ready ter make an attack on them. We'll wipe this here Ted Strong offen ther map afore we gits through. Come

on, Sam. We'll do a little scoutin' an' find out where these fellers are camped. Then we'll go back an' report. We won't bring back any game with us, but we'll bring some news that'll be worth more than game ter ther gang. It's a dangerous thing for us ter have those fellers prowlin' around this here vicinity, an' our best move is ter run them outer here or wipe them offen ther map jest as quick as ever we can."

Sam Rooks was not as enterprising and courageous a man as his companion.

He would have much preferred to go away without making any further investigations concerning this boy who had proved himself so dangerous with a revolver. But his companion, Hillars, was of another stamp. Although the young rough rider had held him at a disadvantage and cowed him temporarily, he had vowed revenge upon him.

Hillars was a man who generally kept vows when they were of this nature, and his friend, Rooks, who was a weaker man, had no choice but to follow him.

Both of them were well acquainted with the country in the vicinity, and so they had little difficulty in skirting around till they came in sight of the clump of trees where the three rough riders had their camp.

Hillars knew that the trees marked the presence of the only stream of water in the vicinity, and he had come to the conclusion that the young rough riders had their camp at that spot.

Although an outlaw and tough character generally, Hillars had a good mind and more intelligence than any of his companions except Tremaine, who had joined the crowd with which he lived that morning, but who had been known to most of the members of the gang some time before.

When they came in sight of the clump of timber, the two outlaws crouched in the shelter of a clump of sagebrush and watched it.

They could see a faint spiral of blue smoke curling up into the still air above the trees. Bud Morgan had lit a fire there some time before, and was now engaged in cooking the juicy venison steaks which the boys had brought home to the camp with them after their hunt.

The sun had set and night was falling rapidly. Under cover of the darkness the two outlaws crawled closer and closer under the shelter of clumps of scrub oak and sagebrush.

More than once they had eluded sheriffs who were after them, and they knew how to take to cover.

Rooks sniffed the fragrant odor of coffee that came from the camp of the young rough riders.

"Those fellers are havin' a fine supper in there, an' we are hidin' out here with not a thing to eat."

"I'd like to send a bullet through one of them there fellers," growled Hillars, "but they're pretty foxy. They keep behind the shelter of them trees, an' you'll notice that they've piled up a lot of them there fallen logs inter a sorter fort. They keep outside of the light of the fire, too. Ye cain't see them very well, as they sit in ther shadows. It ain't ther first time them fellers hes been on ther trail. They know what they air doin' all right."

"From all thet I can see from here there don't seem to be more'n three or four of them."

"There is only three. Tremaine told me thet there was more than that in the gang, seven or eight I think he said, but they must have left ther rest of them at home. I'm goin' ter take a shot at them, anyhow."

"Better not. They'll git after us shore, an' thet there young feller is a terror with his weepins."

Hillars paid no attention to the protest of his more timid companion. He crouched forward in the underbrush, leveled his rifle and fired.

The bullet could be heard thudding into the trunk of

one of the fallen trees, and Bud Morgan leaped to his feet with a wild yell.

At almost the same moment three flashes of fire appeared in the darkness among the trees, and three crashing revolver reports sounded out on the air.

Hillars groaned and leaped to his feet, holding his left hand to his mouth.

The hand had been struck by a revolver bullet, and the bones of two of the fingers had been crushed.

Rooks ducked away into the underbrush.

A bullet had sung so close to his head that there was no joke about it.

A moment later the two villains were running for their lives.

They did not stop until they were a safe distance away from the camp of the young rough riders.

"No use tryin' those fellers to-night," groaned Hillars, nursing his wounded hand. "They are greased lightning with their weapons, and they'll keep one on guard after this. But to-morrow I'll get square for this. I'll get Tremaine to help me set some sort of a trap for them. He'll be glad to do it."

"We'd better get back to camp as fast as possible."

"We'll get even with them," groaned Hillars. "To-morrow I'll work a game on them. They think they are mighty smart, but to-morrow they'll be led into an ambush, an' then all of Ted Strong's shootin' won't help him none. Ted Strong will be wiped offen ther map ter-morrer."

In the meantime, the three rough riders had made a hasty search about the camp for the man who had fired at them in the darkness. They found no one, and they knew that it would not be safe to venture far in the darkness. They returned to their camp, made their fortifications still more complete, and spent the night with one man on guard, little suspecting the deep-laid plans that were being made to entrap them the following day.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE GUIDE.

The three rough riders were up preparing breakfast early the next morning. They had taken turns at going on guard during the previous night, but not one of the three showed any particular weariness, owing to the fact that their sleep had not been disturbed. Anyone who sleeps outdoors, breathing the fresh, pure air of the prairies, will find himself much more rested than if the same time had been spent sleeping between brick walls on a soft feather bed with only a small window, or, perhaps, not that even, to let in the wholesome outdoor air.

Bud had just kindled the fire afresh, and Kit was engaged in broiling a venison steak over the coals when Ted suddenly leaped to his feet, snatching a rifle from the ground.

"Come out of there!" he cried, sternly, pointing the rifle at a clump of bushes not far away. "Come out of there. I have you covered. You can't fool me by skulking there. If you want to say anything to us come out and talk to us like a man."

An ordinary individual would not have seen anything unusual in the appearance of the bush, but the keen eye of the young rough rider had noticed that it was stirring in a suspicious manner. He had come to the conclusion that it was a human being that was moving there, and events showed that his conclusion was a correct one.

The bush stirred still more, and then there crawled out of it, on his hands and knees, a most remarkable-looking individual. He was tall and gaunt, and wore a short beard of the old-fashioned kind known as a "goatee" on his chin.

As he straightened up and faced the boys it could be seen that he wore a shiny, black frock coat and checked trousers. In one hand he carried a battered-looking carpetbag, and in the other he bore a blousy-looking umbrella.

He ducked his head to the boys.

"Waal, gents," he said, in a thin, rasping voice, "haow do ye find yourselves this mornin', an' what kin I do for ye?"

"We find ourselves all right," said Ted, staring curiously at this queer specimen of humanity, who looked like an old-time New England farmer, who had suddenly been transported to the wild West and did not know what to make of it. "How do you find yourself. Let me advise you that it is not an altogether healthy thing to come sneaking on a man in this vicinity. We were attacked by outlaws last night, and we are forced to keep a pretty close lookout."

"Attached by outlaws, was ye?" ejaculated the stranger. "Waal, I swan! Ef that don't beat the Dutch. An' air you boys campin' out here all by your lonesomes?"

"That's what we are doing. You don't look as if you were a native of this country yourself. Stay and have breakfast with us, if you like."

"Thank ye, kindly. Thet there coffee and thet there meat smells good. I reckon ye won't find it hard to persuade me to stay a spell. But how in the name of Jeremiah do ye get fresh cow's meat out here? This country isn't any good fer grazin', and ye couldn't hev brought it with ye."

"Jumpin' sandhills!" said Bud Morgan, staring at the stranger. "Whatever portion of the globe do ye come from, anyway, that ye can't tell fresh venison from cow's meat?"

"I come from the good old State of New Jersey, where they don't have particular much venison. I never ate no deer's meat till I come out here to what they calls the wild West to make my fortune."

"What's yer name, and what brought you out here, anyway?"

"My name is Hiram Skeggs. I had a farm in Jersey, but I sold it out when I invented Skeggs' patent pain killer. I have this here bag full of it, an' I'm a-sellin' througout the length and breadth of the United States. I hope you fellers ain't outlaws. If you're outlaws I won't have nothing ter do with ye. I'll clear right away from here. I was in the camp of some outlaws yesterday, and they made me dance by firing their pistils at my feet. They wouldn't buy none of the pain killer. Instead of thet, they took all the money I had away from me and jest left me enough of the pain killer to continue business with. I got away from the gang an' hid in that there bush. I jest woke up when I heard you sing out to come out or get shot. I didn't want to get shot nohow, so I come out. But if you fellers is outlaws tell me right away, and I'll skip. I don't want to be robbed any more."

"We are not outlaws," said Ted, with a laugh. "You can rest your mind on that score. We are on the trail of an outlaw ourselves. Perhaps you can give us some information concerning him. Sit down, anyhow, and have some breakfast."

"On the trail of a outlaw, be ye?" said Skeggs, slowly lowering himself to the ground and stretching out his long legs in front of the fire. "Thet's mighty interestin'. Ye must be mighty brave boys to be goin' after outlaws. I tell ye I was plumb near scared to death when I got among 'em. I ain't got over it yet. Not by a jugful!"

"Throw that under your belt, and you'll feel a heap better," said Bud, handing over a tin cup filled with hot coffee to the Jersey man. "Jumpin' sandhills! There ain't nothin' will brace up a man in the mornin' like a good, stiff cup of coffee, an' I knows how to make one if anyone does. An' when ye foller that up with a nice piece of venison steak, broiled over the embers of a wood fire, I think you will feel a heap better."

"Thank you, kindly," said the countryman, swallowing the steaming coffee at a gulp and reaching out his

hand for the tin plate which Kit had just filled with freshly broiled venison. "This here kind treatment on the part of yew boys does me good. If ye ever come around to Skeggs' Corners, in the State of New Jersey, I'll give ye the best mug of cider ye ever put down yer throat."

Skeggs pitched into the food in a way that showed that, in spite of the harsh treatment he had received from the outlaws, his appetite was unimpaired.

The boys were hungry themselves, and for a moment there was nothing said, while goodly portions of hard bread, taken from the saddlebags, and fresh killed venison, were stowed away.

Presently Skeggs looked up from his plate and announced that he was satisfied.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Ted. "I want to ask you some questions about these outlaws with whom you have been sojourning, and I was afraid that if you got much more inside of you that you would be too full to talk."

"I'll talk all ye want now," said Skeggs. "Ask me any questions you please."

"That's what I intended to do. In the first place, where are these outlaws you were staying with recently?"

"There's a couple of cabins about three or four miles to the westward of here in the sheltered side of a hill," said Skeggs. "That's where they hang out. These cabins are sorter dugouts in the side of the hill, roofed over, an' they're fixed so thet a sheriff dassent go near 'em for fear of gettin' a bullet plugged inter his head."

"How many are there of them?"

"How many outlaws or how many cabins?"

"How many outlaws?"

"There was three of them, but now there are four."

"When did the fourth come in?"

"He come from the southeast somewheres. It seemed as how ther was some one after him a-chasin' him. He was in a durned hurry ter git ter the cabins an' said that he was glad he was in a safe place at last. There were two other fellers come with him, but they didn't stay at the dugouts. They were sent further down the country for something or other. It seemed as if the feller that stayed was their boss."

"What kind of a man was he?"

"An outlaw, I tell ye—at least, he must have been an outlaw or he wouldn't have been so thick with those other outlaws."

"I mean what did he look like?"

"He was a big feller with a black beard. He had a bag with him with some papers in et. I heard his conversation with some of the other fellers there, and it seemed as though he had stole the papers from his own sister. He must be a bad one, all right. The papers were title deeds to some land or some pesky thing like that."

"By Jove!" cried Kit, jumping to his feet, "that is the very man we are after. That answers the description of the fellow we are after. That's Tremaine to a dot. We've found him, Ted, and it won't take us long to round him up now."

"Tremaine!" cried Skeggs. "By gum, if that ain't the name that the other fellers called the man with the black beard. I'm a whale. How in the name of aunt Mariar did ye know that that was his name?"

"We knew from ther description," said Bud. "Jumpin' sandhills! Ther ain't no doubt now but thet is shore ther right man. We'll round him up, Teddie, old boy. This here lanky pard of ours, with the goat's whiskers, will lead us to ther spot where he is, an' we'll jump him good an' plenty. See if we don't."

"And Skeggs here will lead us to him," said Kit.

"How about that?" said Ted, looking keenly at the farmer.

"I'll lead ye to them, all right," said Skeggs, cheerfully. "You fellers have given me a gol-swiggled fine

meal, an' any little favor I can do for ye in return I will be glad to do."

"Don't you feel afraid about going back among those outlaws?"

Skeggs hesitated a little before he answered and shifted his feet uneasily.

"Oh, fer the matter of that," he said, "I'm willin' ter take a chance, seein' as you fellers are sot on runnin' this here feller down. You'll pertect me from them, won't ye? An' then maybe ye'll git my money back for me."

"It is going to be three of us against three or four outlaws," said Ted, thoughtfully. "There won't be any joke about capturing this man, for he will fight desperately. The other men are probably of the toughest description, and we will have our hands full without a doubt."

"Jumpin' sandhills!" said Bud, "we gave Tremaine a tough fight on the train. We'll give him a tougher one now, all right."

"Have you got a horse?" asked Ted, turning suddenly to Skeggs.

"I've got a mule," said the farmer. "Her name is Maude. The outlaws said she was too much for them, so they let me keep her. I left her back on the trail a little way."

"Bring her here," said Ted. "We'll saddle up in the meantime. We'll start for this outlaw stronghold in about twenty minutes, and you are going to guide us there."

Skeggs hurried away with a queer expression of satisfaction on his twisted face.

CHAPTER IX.

A TREACHEROUS GUIDE.

"And you say that the cabins where these outlaws are concealed are just on the other side of that hill?"

It was Ted Strong who spoke. He was riding in advance beside Skeggs, who was mounted on a sorry-looking mule.

Kit and Bud were a little further back on the trail. They carried their weapons in their hands and kept a close lookout on both sides of the road.

Ted Strong knew that he was moving through a dangerous piece of country, and he did not intend to be caught napping.

"The cabins are just over the top of the hill. When ye reach the top ye could drop down right on the roof of them, but thet isn't the best way to go. The outlaws will be watching on that side."

"Which is the best way to go?"

"Around the side of the hill there. There is a clump of trees through which you can sneak right up on the cabins without anyone seeing ye."

Ted turned around to his followers.

"Boys," he said, "I am going along with our friend, here, on foot. You and Bud can take care of the horse and mule. And be sure to keep a close watch out on both sides and behind."

"Trust us for that," said Kit. Both Kit and Bud felt a little nervous about the danger into which Ted was running, but they knew that whatever he said went, and that there was no use disputing with him.

"Now," said Ted, looking sternly at Skeggs, "just drop off that mule of yours and come along with me."

"Goin' ter walk around? I'm not very fond of walking."

"You'll have to take a little walk now. I am going to see that you earn the breakfast that I gave you."

Skeggs slipped from the back of his animal. There was something in Ted's voice that told him that the young rough rider was prepared to enforce any command that he might give, and that it would be folly to attempt to disobey.

Ted's face had been bright and cheerful while they

were making the journey. Now it was as black as a thundercloud. Skeggs looked at it and noticed the change. His own face turned a shade paler, but he said nothing to indicate what his thoughts were.

Ted slipped from the back of his cayuse, put the bridle in the hands of Bud Morgan and the two stepped forward together.

The side of the hill was grown with rank buffalo grass and scraggy timber, and the two were soon lost to the sight of the watchers who had been left behind.

Skeggs started over to the right as though to skirt the side of the hill, but the young rough rider grasped him by the arm and held him fast.

"Not that way," he said. "We are going right forward."

"Not up over the top of the hill?"

"Yes, up over the top. That is just the way that we are going."

"They'll be on the lookout there."

"They may be. But we'll be on the lookout, too."

"It ain't safe to go that way."

"It will be a good deal safer for you to go quietly that way than to attempt to go any other."

Skeggs looked around at the young rough rider.

The face of the boy was stern and merciless.

Skeggs also noticed that the revolver that had been in the belt of the young rough rider was pointed directly at him.

"Jeerusalem!" he said. "What does that mean?"

"It means that you are to walk on ahead—that you are to walk the way I say, and that, furthermore, if you attempt to turn and run, or to raise your voice above a whisper you are going to get a forty-four caliber bullet in the small of your back. Understand?"

Skeggs understood. A cold perspiration stood out upon his brow, and he shivered as though he had been suddenly stricken with an ague.

"Before you go any further," said Ted, in a cold, stern voice, "I want you to raise your hands above your head for a moment or so. Raise them!"

Skeggs hesitated.

"Raise them!"

The command was spoken in a low, tense tone, and at the same time the muzzle of the long revolver was poked hard into the pit of his stomach.

The arms of the farmer shot up in the air as though they worked on a string and the string had been pulled hard. The revolver remained where it was, but at the same time Ted's left hand went out, and with a single movement tore open the front of the long, black coat which the farmer wore.

Underneath it was something found very rarely either on a New Jersey farmer, or on a seller of pain killer—namely, a belt of arms, stocked with a long row of gleaming cartridges and a murderous-looking six-shooter.

"I thought so," said Ted, in the same quiet tone, while a grim smile flitted across his face. "This is just what I expected to find here. While I am relieving you of this gun, which must be rather heavy for you to carry around with you, let me remind you that my own gun is still pressed close against your stomach, that it has a hair trigger and that a very slight pressure of the finger, which is now crooked around it, will cause a hole to be bored right through your worthless body. Just bear that in mind, will you?"

By this time Ted had the other weapon in his own hand and pointed at the head of Skeggs.

The man was the color of ashes.

"For Heaven's sake, boss!" he pleaded; "let up on me. Don't shoot me down like a dog. I'll tell ye anything you wanter know."

"Then pull that false beard off your chin before you say another word."

Skeggs obeyed. The removal of the false beard made a wonderful change in his appearance.

The face was no longer the face of the New Jersey farmer, but the face of Sam Rooks, the taller of the two men whom the boys had encountered the day before.

"I thought so," said Ted, quietly. "Really you may take my word for it, that you look much better that way than with the false beard. Who in the world ever told you that you could fool me with a cheap disguise like that?"

"Tremaine and Hillars put me up to it," faltered Rooks, in his own natural voice. "I didn't want to do it, boss. They made me. They threatened to puncture me if I didn't."

"Well, let me tell you that I saw that you were working some game before you talked to me for three minutes. Let me also inform you that I knew that your beard was false the moment that you raised your coffee cup to your lips. I soon found out who you were. I suppose that it was you and Hillars that fired upon me last night."

"It was," nodded the frightened Rooks. "Hillars got two of his fingers smashed with a bullet that one of you fellows fired."

"I'm sorry, but he brought it on himself."

"Let me go, boss. P'int them guns away from me. I know what a dead shot ye air. I never wanted to go into this thing against ye."

"You went into it all the same. You were sent down there in that disguise, which might have fooled some people, but which could not fool me, to lead me into some sort of a trap. I can see Tremaine's hand in this, and I might have known that he would be in league out here with just such people as you. How much did he pay you for your part in this plot?"

"Fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars! For fifty dollars you agreed to take part in a murder. I know that Tremaine would kill me at once if he ever got his hands on me. I would be perfectly justified in shooting you dead where you stand. I'll do it, too, if you disobey me in the least trifle."

Ted emphasized this remark with a poke in the stomach with the muzzle of the revolver that nearly knocked the man down.

"I want you to walk three paces ahead of me the way you were going to walk. I know that you intended to have me walk ahead, but you are going ahead this time."

"Not that!" gasped Rooks.

"Either that or a bullet, and right away, too."

Rooks cast one despairing glance at the face of the young rough rider. There was no mercy there. He turned around and started slowly forward.

"Don't try to deceive me," said Ted. "I have you covered behind you. Go off to the right as you planned to, and don't speak unless you want a bullet through your back."

CHAPTER X.

ONE AGAINST THREE AND A FIGHT TO THE FINISH.

For twenty paces Rooks marched along in a cold perspiration. He dared not look behind him. He knew from the faint rustle of a leaf occasionally that Ted Strong was still behind him, and already he had seen enough of the young rough rider to know that his finger was still pressed on the triggers of his weapons, and that the muzzles of those weapons were still pointed unwaveringly at his back.

He walked in a beaten path, clearly defined, through the underbrush which ran out to the right as though it were going to skirt the base of the hill. Presently they came to a point where the path dipped sharply between two walls of rock that rose for about ten feet on either side of it.

At this point Rooks hesitated and half turned.

"Go on," said Ted, in a whisper which was perfectly distinct to his ears, however. "Go on as you were going to have me go. Hesitate or cry out and you'll get two bullets through you—one through your head and the other through your body. They may kill me afterward, but my first two bullets shall go into your body. I'll make sure that you go out of the world before me."

Rooks felt that he was going to his death or to something very certain.

He knew the trap that had been laid for Ted Strong.

Now he was forced to walk into it himself. He felt, however, that if he hesitated death was certain, while if he went on there was a chance for his life. It seemed as if the stern-faced boy behind him had mesmerized him. He felt now that he was unable to act or think for himself.

He moved forward, slowly and unwillingly, like the man who is mounting the gallows to be hanged—forward into the dark gully that had become the valley of the shadow of death for him.

One, two, three steps he took forward into the narrow gully. Then he suddenly tossed his hands in the air and, yelling wildly, started to run with the speed of a deer.

Ted's weapons cracked, but that instant there was a roar far louder than ever made by any revolver—a roar like the crash of a ten-inch gun.

The air was filled with clouds of dust, and Ted felt himself blinded and staggering back a little.

When he opened his eyes again he saw that the whole gully had been filled up with a rock tons in weight which had been loosened by means of levers from the cliff above and at the right instant, as the villains who planned the trap had thought, to catch the young rough riders beneath it and crush them.

The men at the top of the cliff had not been able to look down into the gully to see when the rough riders should enter it.

They had placed themselves on the other side of the balancing rock, which they had pitched down so that they could bear their weight on it at the proper instant, and at the same time keep themselves concealed.

When Ted opened his eyes again, three figures had dropped down to the top of the fallen rock.

They thought that the young rough rider was beneath it. They thought that the yell they had heard was from him, for they had arranged with Rooks that he was to remain behind and that they were to pitch the rock down when they heard footsteps in the gully below.

Rooks had barely saved himself by running.

He was now mounted on a horse, riding away for his life. Ted's shots had been caught in the descending mass of rock, and he himself, if he had been a few steps further on, would have been crushed beneath it.

Now, as he opened his eyes, Ted found himself face to face with the three men he had fought with in the train.

His own friends were a quarter of a mile away, and could know nothing of his peril.

"Shoot him," yelled Tremaine, his face wearing the expression of a fiend. "The others have been caught, but this young hound is still alive. We have him now. He can't escape us now."

Ted had dropped like a flash when he opened his eyes. It was well for him that he did so, for at that instant two revolvers crashed and two bullets sped through the air at the spot where he had been an instant before.

He raised himself on one elbow and fired through the dust.

One of the men cried out wildly on his Maker and pitched headlong. There was a bullet through his shoulder.

Crack! c-r-a-c-k!! Tremaine and the other man. Jenks, it was—were crouching forward in the heavy, hanging dust, firing at the young rough rider.

Ted seemed to rise from the ground for a moment, and then drop out of sight.

Jenks leaped to his feet.

"He's done for," he yelled, and rushed at the prostrate form of the young rough rider.

Crack! It was Ted's revolver that spoke this time, and he was firing with an aim that was as steady as though he were firing at a target. His fall had been a ruse to draw the others from the cover they had taken.

Jenks slid to the ground on his hands and knees, almost on top of the young rough rider.

"Curse you!" he cried, hoarsely. "You've shot me through the leg, but I'll kill you yet. Take that!"

He placed his revolver within an inch of the head of the young rough rider and fired.

Ted caught the barrel, as the trigger was pulled, in a hand of iron and twisted it upward.

The hot flame from the muzzle scorched and blackened his face, the grains of powder bit deep into his forehead, but the bullet itself sped over his head.

Jenks smashed the weapon in his face, but Ted clung to the barrel and twisted it from his hand. It dropped clattering to the ground. With a terrible yell of rage Jenks launched himself at the young rough rider.

Ted rose on his knees to meet him. His fist caught him flush in the face.

The head of the train robber swayed backward and a torrent of blood gushed from his nose. But at the same time he reached for the throat of the young rough rider and caught it in both his hands. It was the grip of a desperate man, and for an instant the rough rider felt all his senses reel and saw everything turn black before his eyes.

He scarcely knew what he was doing, but the fighting instinct was still strong within him.

He shifted his grip on the weapon that he still held in his right hand and caught it by the muzzle. He brought it crashing down on the head of his opponent. The man's grip relaxed and he slipped to the ground unconscious.

Ted rose unsteadily to his feet and faced Tremaine. Tremaine, up to this point, had stood in the background.

Now he advanced, a leveled weapon in his hand

"You're at my mercy now," he hissed. "I'll have my revenge now."

There are times when Ted Strong's blood is fully up. When the contest has turned against him and it seems that his strength is exhausted, that a great fury fills his heart and he fights with the recklessness and ferocity of a madman. At such moments his strength, which at ordinary times is far above the average, seems to be doubled, his muscles are of iron, and his nerves of steel.

This was one of those moments. Tremaine thought that he was facing a beaten and exhausted boy. All he had to do was pull the trigger and end it.

Instead of that he found that he was facing a young giant.

Without a moment's warning—with a spring like that of a panther—Ted leaped upon him. There was no time for him to fire his revolver. It was torn from his hand and dashed to the ground before he could move a muscle. He felt himself borne back by the weight of the young rough rider, which was thrown full upon him.

He grabbed blindly for the knife at his belt and raised it in the air to plunge into the throat of the boy who was driving him backward.

Ted was fighting with his bare hands now, but

Tremaine might as wisely and well have tried to cope with a lion. His wrist was caught in a grip of steel.

Ted Strong pulled upon it hard and suddenly.

A scream of agony came from the lips of Tremaine. He was borne to his knees with that powerful twist.

It seemed as if every bone in his body had been smashed and crushed, so terrible was the pain.

He tried to gain his feet again, but he lurched forward.

Ted drew back his right arm, swung his body around, and lashed out with a blow that would have felled an ox.

It landed on the chin, where it was aimed for.

Kit and Bud, who had heard the crash of the falling rock and the fusillade of revolver shots, were hurrying forward into the gully and saw Ted deliver this last mighty blow.

They heard the crack of it against the man's jawbone fifty yards away, and saw Tremaine's body suddenly fall into a limp, shapeless heap, as though it was death itself that had smitten him.

When they came up to Ted the fight was over.

Three men lay groaning and half conscious, two of them in pools of their own blood, in the mass of earth and stones that had been scattered about by the falling rock.

The young rough rider himself was standing a little distance away from them. His face was black with powder smoke, his knuckles were cut across and bleeding, but there was a smile in his brown eyes.

* * * * * * *

A few days later Adelaide Tremaine received, at Beaumont, the papers which had been stolen from her on the train. They were found in the dugout cabin in which Tremaine had taken shelter. None of the outlaws were found there, and it was supposed that they fled to different parts of the country.

A week later Tremaine and his two companions were in jail in Chicago, and Ted Strong had gone west again to join the rest of the young rough riders.

Rooks had escaped completely on a horse belonging to Tremaine, and as he had been nothing but a tool in the hands of stronger and more determined villains, no great search was ever made for him.

Ted stopped for a while longer in Kansas, making many friends there and arranging for the sale of several herds of long-horn cattle.

When he went west to find further adventures in the Rockies, he took with him the good wishes of a score of ranchers and cowboys who had learned to admire the pluck and courage that he had shown, and were grateful to him for the work that he had done in rounding up a dangerous gang of outlaws.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 38, will contain "The Young Rough Riders in the Rockies; or, Fighting in Mid-air." One glance at the cover of this story, when it comes to your newsdealer, will give you an idea of its exciting contents. It has been pronounced one of the most thrilling stories of Western adventure ever written. Ted Strong and his comrades went through many thrilling exploits, but the dangers they encountered in the Rockies outranked anything they had ever met before.

Beginning with the next week the readers of this weekly will find that the stories are increased over one-third in length. This is in response to a general demand to have the stories issued oftener than once a week. It is impossible to do that, but we have made the stories longer to show our appreciation of the favor with which our readers have received them. With the increased length there will be no change in the price of the weekly and no lowering of the quality of the stories. After this our readers may be certain that they are getting the longest as well as the best stories of their kind published.

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